

R E M A R K S

ON THE

L E T T E R S

FROM AN

AMERICAN FARMER;

OR A

DETECTION of the ERRORS

OF

MR. J. HECTOR ST. JOHN;

Pointing out the pernicious Tendency of these Letters
to Great Britain.



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R E M A R K S
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AMERICAN FARMER.

AT a time like the present, when the weight of accumulated taxes, the natural consequence of war, will create a dissatisfaction in the minds of many persons, with their situations, and make them ready to look out for a settlement in a country where they may hope to obtain a mutual defence with a less expence of government: at a time like the present, when peace is expected to return, a blessing to our country, when a disbanded army and navy will cause an overflowing of hands to all our manufactories, it will become the duty of our Ministers to encourage as much as possible the agriculture, manufactories and commerce of this country, thereby to enable the inhabitants to bear the
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necessary burthens, and to remain happy and contented in their respective situations.

If care be not taken to cherish so laudable a purpose, we shall have the mortification of beholding our inhabitants flocking to that country, which has lately imbrued its fields with the blood of many thousands of our unhappy countrymen ; that country which has been for some years the seat of horrid war ; that country which has become depopulated, its villages deserted, and its fields unfruitful through want of cultivation.

The time being come when the independence of America is in some measure acknowledged by this country, we already see allurements thrown out to encourage the inhabitants of all nations to come and settle with them, and by that means to recover their country from the desolation it has sustained by the war, by draining various nations of their most useful inhabitants, without waiting for the slow increase of natural population. In doing this they shew themselves as politic as they have been in the prosecution of the war, in which they never wantonly wasted human blood, and at the same time manifested that they wanted neither intrepidity nor courage when obliged to

to exert them. This politic conduct in them ought as much as possible to be counteracted, in order to prevent an emigration, which may in the event prove more fatal to this country than the war itself. As false lights are already held out to impose on the credulous, it is the duty of every good citizen to draw aside the veil under which truth is eclipsed.

For these reasons I am induced to lay my sentiments before the public in a most candid and dispassionate manner, anxious to expose an attempt of a late author to mislead the people, and to shew that the publication is a fraud, artfully disguised, and hostile to the happiness of the nation.

After the domestic forgeries of a Lauder, a Bower, and a Chatterton, had been exposed to public view by the acuteness, ingenuity, and learning of a Douglas, a Tyrwhitt, and a Warton; the peace of the literary world is again disturbed by a new species of forgery, imported from the Continent of America, whose emissaries are endeavouring to sow the same seed in this country, which has been so much cultivated there, as to produce a total dismemberment from the British empire: a dismemberment (of which the Americans will

long repent) from a country which they ought to have bent every nerve to have encouraged and supported; a country which had been the means of cultivating their deserts, populating their colonies, providing for their necessities, defending them at the expence of immense treasure and blood, and disposing of the produce of their fields; whilst the only advantage received in return, consisted in supplying with our manufactures their wants, in general on more reasonable terms than it was in the power of any other nation to do.

Several of these forgeries have already appeared, and whilst the critic only examined them in respect to the accuracy of their language, the poison has been permitted to spread to the gross imposition of the inattentive and credulous, whilst they have only excited the ridicule of the intelligent.

Curious travels have been published by one who had only visited the nearer American lakes, when acting as Ranger during the late war; and, like a true Utopian, described a country he had never seen, and consequently knew no more of than what he collected from former publications, or traced in maps during long winter evenings.

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Transatlantic imposition, we find, is not confined to this country alone, for when we read the Abbé Robins account of the virtues and simplicity of the inhabitants of Connecticut*, we must suppose that he wrote only from his own *experience*; a *religious* who conscientiously regards his oath of chastity, *might* retain it in a *convent*, or a *seraglio*, and therefore have a right of extolling the virtue and modesty of their respective inhabitants.

The Abbé also tells us how much the inhabitants of France are improved, [at least those which they sent to America, as they did not wish for any amendment in France] as they were “ strong, bony, tall, staid, sober, and almost grave men! and in the same letter he shews how much the good behaviour of the French had won the hearts of the Americans, so that the house in which the Abbé lodged happening to be on fire, as soon as it was known that it belonged to a Frenchman,

* Les Americains sont grands hospitaliers; ils n'ont qu'un meme lit, l'espouse chaste fut elle seule, le partage sans remords et sans crainte avec son hôte: i. e. The Americans are very hospitable, and have but one bed, which the chastest wife makes no scruple of sharing with her guest, even though her husband be absent. Vide Maty's Review for Sept. p. 209.

not a man would come near to give any assistance."

The pleasing, romantic manner in which the letters, said to be the production of an American farmer, are written, is calculated to work upon the passions, and has gained them a credit in the world, which will be with difficulty effaced by a dry writer of mere facts. The pen of this writer would make an Irish hut appear a palace most devoutly to be wished; surrounded with a potatoe-garden; their cow flowing with healthful lacteal springs, their care by day, their companion by night; for who, that is not destitute of common humanity, can refuse that animal, from which he derives such constant enjoyment, a participation of all the benefits in his power. Their pig, which bleeds for them at Christmas, and is perhaps the only meat they taste in the whole year, it would be cruel to expose him to the severity of the weather, whilst they lie warm on their straw beds; and that smoke, which may annoy a stranger, is of the greatest utility to them in driving away the Irish musketoes [gnats] from their habitations. And the salubrity of this method of living is proved beyond doubt,

doubt, from the supply of hale, stout men, annually exported from thence for the benefit and comfort of the antiquated maidens and young widows of the debilitated inhabitants of this metropolis.

In this manner the wretched inhabitants of the barren islands of Nantucket and Martha's Vineyard become the envy of those who enjoy every blessing which Nature kindly grants, and makes some persons even willing to exchange for the refreshing fragrancy of whale-oil, in the dirty town of Sherburn: this, added to the happiness of marrying very young, and being soon left in a state of widowhood, even for years, whilst the lovely object of her affection is only employed in the pleasant, safe, and profitable amusement of whale-fishing.

It is not my intention to indulge a vein of irony, but to confine myself to facts, and shew that this author was not an American *born*, as he pretends; that he never was a farmer there; that many things which he represents are false; that others, reported as recent facts, are old, if not old women stories, calculated only to excite wonder and astonishment.

I shall not confine myself to any order, but select from the various parts of the work such passages as I apprehend will convince the world that the whole work is an imposition; and perhaps may induce some others, who are better acquainted with America than myself, to examine more (reported as) facts, and to administer an antidote to the poison contained in this book, and be a means of rendering other books, of the same fatal tendency, liable to detection.

The author, at p. 212, calls America his native country; and in several places boasts of his paternal estate; whilst it is a fact well known, that he is a Frenchman, born in Normandy; that his residence was chiefly at New York, and there looked upon by the Loyalists as no friend to Englishmen.

To prove this author was not a farmer, I shall examine the internal evidence of the Letters, and doubt not but they will afford sufficient proof of the fraudulent intention of the author.

For investigating such an enquiry, our attention is naturally drawn to the language, to the facts, and to the object of the book.

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The author describes himself "as a simple cultivator of the earth, who had no other education than reading and writing;" p. 22. "whose knowledge extends no further than to describe our American modes of farming, our manners, and peculiar customs:" p. 2. "whose library had been left him by his father, *whose* father brought them from *England*, and consisted mostly of Scotch divinity, the Navigation of Sir Francis Drake, the History of Queen Elizabeth, and a few miscellaneous volumes." Thus educated in his youth; thus following the plough during his manhood; thus accomplished, and thus furnished with books, we find this frontier farmer introducing scraps of Latin, which, though they shew no depth of erudition, yet they evince that the author has assumed a character which he ill supports: (p. 51.) "*Ubi panis, ibi patria*, is the motto," says he, "of all emigrants."—"He becomes an American, by being received into the broad lap of our great *Alma Mater*." A simple cultivator of the earth ought to have told a plain tale, without the brilliancy of imagination, or the ornament of figures. But these letters discover the characteristic declamation of the

Frenchman, the frothy metaphors of the rhetorician, and the distinguishing verbiage of the petty philosopher of France.

If we enquire into the facts asserted in this book, we find ample room for doubt.—The introductory letter, which you must suppose to have been written nearly 20 years ago, (as the second takes notice of the circumstance of the birth of the writer's first child, which the latter letters declare to be grown nearly marriageable). In the first place he gives you reason to imagine a matrimonial connection, (which very rarely, if ever, takes place) between himself, seemingly an Independent, (as his minister is from Yale College, in Connecticut) and his wife (from her expressions, appears to be) a Quaker.—

P. 17, she mentions "the danger of his being suspected of telling the *king's men* abundance of things." I should not suppose that, at that time, when we were fighting in defence of the Americans, that the very term of *King's Men* was known, or if it were, certainly could not have been a reason for occasioning any jealousy.

In letter 11, p. 24, he tells you, that, since the birth of his child, his excursions had not exceeded the bounds of his farm: and in the

next

next page he says, " whenever I go abroad, it is always involuntarily ; and again at p. 33, he describes a week's jaunt in the woods of bee-hunting. Surely these are contradictions !

At p. 27, his sensibility is much hurt at the sight of an egg brought to the table ; and whilst he carries forward his thoughts to the hen and chickens, and the bold, courageous cock, arrayed with the most majestic plumes, he forgets the acknowledgment he owes to the benignity of Providence, in making fowls so prolific of the most salubrious diet ; and that if every egg was to produce a young bird, in three years, the whole continent of America would not grow provision sufficient for their support. Is the same humanity shewn in not destroying the serpents, who derive their principal sustenance from those birds which feast his ears with the most delightful notes ?

At p. 38, he celebrates the sublime accents of the thrush from on high. Had our author consulted his friend Mr. John Bartram, the celebrated Pennsylvanian botanist, he would have informed him that the thrush had never yet cheered the inhabitants of Pennsylvania with the warbling of its throat, being a bird not known there.

At p. 41. The inconsistency of keeping a nest of hornets in his parlour, and even as playmates and companions for his children, will require no more than mentioning, to confute it; for, in a country where the sting of all poisonous insects is rendered more dangerous in proportion to the increase of heat, the lives of his children must be in continual danger from an accidental hurt or affront. I do not suppose that young hornets live on flies before they are able to provide for themselves, as the hornet is their last state, in which they are produced from the grub in their full growth and strength, as all flies, bees, &c. are; nor do they live on flies whilst in the maggot state.

At p. 43, the author mourns that, for the sake of a little hay, whole subterraneous towns of yellow wasps should be destroyed, which he represents as animals to be "much dreaded; and which fall forth with a fury and velocity superior to man." Thus, if all the inhabitants of America were alive to such delicate impressions as this farmer, the whole continent might become inhabited only by snakes, hornets, and wasps, and the produce of it destroyed by poultry.

In Letter IX. our Author speaks of the great number of valetudinarians from the
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West-Indies, who seek for health at Charles-Town ; a place where, "when they have no sea-breezes, the sun is too powerful ;" here "they seek for the renovation of health, exhausted by the debilitating nature of their sun, air, and modes of living." The West-Indians too well know the salubrity of the milder climate of New York, to seek health where it is not to be found. He then proceeds in giving a common-place account of negro slavery ; but our author is very unhappy in introducing something which must render the credit of the whole doubtful. In this predicament is the story of a slave suspended in an iron cage ; it is related in an affecting manner, but he forgot, that, although the punishment is sometimes inflicted, it is always by the side of a public road, and not in a solitary grove.

Letter X. gives an account of the various kinds of snakes, and particularly of the rattle-snake, most of which is selected from former publications. I shall only take notice of two of the most remarkable stories ; the one at p. 238, where he declares he had it from the *mother* and *widow* of the victims. "A Dutch farmer, in the Minisink went to mowing with his negroes, in his boots, a precaution used to prevent being stung. Inadvertently he trod on a snake, which immediately

mediately flew at his legs; and as it drew back, in order to renew its blow, one of the negroes cut it in two with his scythe. They prosecuted their work, and returned home; at night the farmer pulled off his boots and went to bed, and was soon after attacked with a strange sickness at his stomach: he swelled, and, before a physician could be sent for, died. The sudden death of this man did not cause much inquiry; the neighbourhood wondered, as is usual in such cases, and, without any further examination, the corpse was buried. A few days after the son put on the father's boots, and went to the meadow; at night he pulled them off, went to bed, and was attacked with the same symptoms about the same time, and died in the morning. A little before he expired the Doctor came, but was not able to assign what should be cause of so singular a disorder; however, rather than appear wholly at a loss to the country people, he pronounced both father and son to have been bewitched. Some weeks after the widow sold all her moveables for the benefit of the younger children, and the farm was leased. One of the neighbours, who bought the boots, presently put them on, and was attacked in the same manner as the

the other two had been; but this man's wife being alarmed by what had happened in the other family, dispatched one of her negroes for an eminent physician, who fortunately having heard something of the dreadful affair, guessed at the cause, applied oil, &c. and recovered the man. The boots, which had been so fatal, were then carefully examined; and he found that the two fangs of the snake had been left in the leather, after being wrenched out of their sockets by the strength with which the snake had drawn back its head. The bladders, which contained the poison, and several of the small nerves, were still fresh, and adhered to the boot. The unfortunate father and son had been poisoned by pulling off these boots, in which action they imperceptibly scratched the legs with the point of the fangs, through the hollow of which some of this astonishing poison was conveyed."

The similitude of the foregoing story to the following, which was sent over by Captain Walduck, and read before the Royal Society, Jan. 7, 1713-4, and to be found in Sloane MS. No. 3339, in the British Museum, is sufficient to suppose it only varied by being frequently told; and perhaps, like many vulgar errors,

we may be at a loss to find whence it derived its origin.

A man in Virginia being in the woods, having a pair of boots on, was bit by a rattlesnake through his boot, came home to his wife and died; his boots were hung up in the house, and his widow married a second husband, who put on these boots; and by riding a small journey, complained with a pain in his leg, and likewise died. The boots were hung up again, and the woman married the third husband, who made use of the same boots; and the first time of wearing them complained, as the former, of a small tumor in his leg, and likewise died. Upon this the Surgeon cuts the boot in pieces, and found the tooth of the rattlesnake that bit the first husband, and did all the execution since, as small as a hair; they took it out with a pair of forceps, and pricked a dog with it, that within a few hours died; the Surgeon took the tooth, and some time after tried it upon another dog, and it did him no hurt; and it was supposed the snake was dead.

The other, which I shall take notice of, is at p. 245; the impossibility of a snake, only six feet long, pulling down a stalk of hemp, up one of which the American farmer had just

just before climbed, to see the amazing conflict between the two snakes, begun in the adjacent field.

In the visit to Mr. Bartram, one great discovery is made, p. 256; that, by spreading old hay, straw, and damaged fodder upon barren ground, it may be made fruitful.—There is no need to receive such information from America!—But, p. 257, that the Red Clover, which is only a biennial plant, should flourish three years on Mr. Bartram's estate, will require more evidence to gain our assent than our author has produced.

If we turn our attention to the object of the book, it will plainly appear to be designed for the purpose of encouraging foreigners to emigrate and settle in America; this appears in the dedication to the Abbé Raynal: "you viewed these provinces of North America in their true light, as the asylum of freedom, as the cradle of future nations, as the refuge of *distressed Europeans*. To exhibit this country as an asylum for unsettled Europeans is certainly the principal design of the book; but as I have shewn that the stile is by no means that of a *simple cultivator of the earth*, and that many of the facts are misrepresented, I shall also shew, that the

objects are delusive, which are held out to attract the attention of those, who (perhaps they know not why) are tired of living in a country of freedom, and where the happiness of the people is the wish and attention of every branch of the administration.

In the two first letters this design does not much appear; but in the third the mask is thrown aside, in describing what an American is. In this he describes the feelings of an Englishman when he first lands in that country, and what does he say more than may be said of every county in England, which, without doubt, have been within the last hundred years more improved, civilized, and cultivated than America itself, and there still remains sufficient room for improvement for the honest and industrious for some centuries to come; but some men are never content with present happiness, but are ever pursuing the shadow whilst they lose the substance. Others will not employ that industry in England, which they cannot avoid in America, and had rather remain a burthen and disgrace to their friends and relations, than become useful members of society.

At p. 46, he represents America, "not as Europe, consisting of great Lords, who possess

possess every thing, and a herd of people who have nothing." With respect to great Lords the country has not been inhabited long enough for many persons to have amassed lordly estates, but those who have power exercise it in the most tyrannical manner, both over their slaves, and those who, perhaps, are if possible in a worse situation than their slaves, the poor distressed Europeans, who may have been deluded with false pretences from their native hospitable shore, to cultivate forests for their, perhaps, inhuman masters. At p. 56, our author shews the progress of these wretched emigrants, "driven to the extended line of frontiers, "*there* the last settlers dwell." "*There* remote from the power of example, and the check of shame, many families exhibit the most hideous parts of our society." His father was one of this class, (if we may believe him) "who by good conduct and temperance transmitted to me his fair inheritance, when not above one in fourteen of his contemporaries had the same good fortune." "*Emigrants!* you see the hope of success which you have a right to expect.

After thus describing the situation of emigrants at their first coming over, at p. 73 he

presents us with quite a contrary picture, and whilst pages thus contradict each other, we know not which to believe : but the young mind, unstable in its opinions, warm in its enterprises, in imagination already becomes a successful emigrant, and is thus hurried away to destruction. Too many of the inhabitants of this country have been deluded by the story of Whittington and his cat; a Butcher's son becoming a Cardinal; and a Blacksmith a Prime Minister; with two late examples of our Lord Mayors, one who, from a drawer, had nearly viewed the whole city in flames, and retained his *temerity* even in his advanced state; whilst the other, on his advance to the chair, endeavoured to raise the emulation of city youths, by recommending his own success for their example, and went through the duties of his office with that propriety of character which always distinguished him. Thus the successful are held out for examples, whilst the unfortunate are buried in oblivion. There are many whose misfortunes may not have been brought upon themselves by any want of care or industry, but looked upon by their friends as a sufficient reason for neglecting them : thus neglected and reduced to the most excruciating distress, poverty,

verty, and perhaps disease, are, as it were, obliged to have recourse to wicked pursuits, for the support of a wretched existence, until Tyburn too frequently relieves them from their misery.

As another motive of encouragement to the abandoned and dissolute to seek their fortune in America, our author holds out the total want of religion, that coming amongst others like themselves, they may pursue their wicked courses, and live without God in this world, or without the dread of him in a future. *Thus, by all means, he hopes to gain some.*

This shews the necessity of an established church, without which a total forgetfulness of all religion naturally takes place.

Our farmer assures us, p. 10, that he lived on the edge of the great wilderness, three hundred miles from the sea, on the Pennsylvanian frontier, and he dates his epistle dedicatory from Carlisle. But had he tilled his lands in any part of Cumberland county, of which Carlisle is the shire town, he would have known that for years before the present war, there was a continued line of settlements from the banks of the Delaware to the margin of the Ohio; that justice was distributed,
and

and the gospel preached, with as much regularity at Pittsburg, [the French Fort du Quesne,] as at Philadelphia; and the farmer, the merchant, and the lawyer, pursued their respective vocations with the same tranquillity near the fair Allegheny, as in the vicinity of the muddy Schuylkill.

Here, [in the neighbourhood of Carlisle] says our genuine farmer, p. 7, "We have had no war to desolate our fields, since the present troubles were not broke out when this letter was written." No! the French never engaged the savages by flatteries and presents, to drive the Pennsylvanian settlers from that frontier in 1753. Washington himself was not taken by the French and Indians in fort Neccessity in 1754. Braddock was not defeated and slain by them on the 9th of July, 1755. Dunbar did not retreat with the remains of his army through Carlisle to Philadelphia. The whole frontier settlers did not abandon their dwellings in dismay, and retire to the eastward of Susquehannah, even to Lancaster. No! yet our author was then a man, and tilled the ground left by his father to him on the edge of the wilderness westward of Carlisle.

Led away by an affectation of parade, or of singularity, our author avowedly sets history at defiance, and appears to rely on disquisition rather than experience and facts. In this temper he asserts, p. 68, "Whatever has been said of the four New England provinces, no such degeneracy of manners has ever tarnished their annals, their back settlers have been kept within the bounds of decency and government, by wise laws, and the influence of religion;" of which, at p. 61, he supposes they will be soon destitute. Our Pennsylvanian farmer had never heard, it seems, of the murder of the St. Francis Indians by the frontier settlers of New Hampshire in 1753, which brought on the subsequent war. No! the murderers were not rescued from the officers of justice, in January, 1754, by a body of armed ruffians. Of the continued contests between the border settlers of Massachusetts-Bay and New York, our simple cultivator of the earth had never been told during his residence at New York. The Sheriff of Albany, with the power of the country, had never, it seems, been repulsed by the frontier inhabitants of Massachusetts-Bay during the last war with France. Lord Loudon did not employ, in
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November, 1756, the army, which had just returned from opposing the French, to quell a civil war, which had proceeded to riot and bloodshed between the provinces. The army was not employed as it marched down from Canada, in 1765, to quell the Bennington mobs. The King's troops did not bring the rioters to New York gaol, that they might be brought to justice. The Connecticut people never marched across New York and Jersey, and forcibly seized part of Pennsylvania. No! No! No!

It was a prejudice unworthy of a philosophical farmer to remark, p. 51, "That the province of Nova Scotia is very thinly inhabited; that the power of the crown, in conjunction with the Musquitos, had prevented men from settling there. Yet some parts of it flourished once, and it contained a mild, harmless set of people." Our farmer, who is fond of making reflections on nature and nature's laws, and doubtless being a judge of the fertility of the country, might have discovered, had the recital of truth been his object, that the barrenness of the soil, and fog-giness of the atmosphere, had been at all times the real obstructions to the population of a country, which, though it has been
praised

praised by philosophers, had been always avoided by settlers.

It is unnecessary for me to add any thing more on this subject, having, as I think, shewn sufficiently the credit which this book merits, and shall beg leave to remind the censors of literary productions, that they ought to be more careful of recommending books composed of so many falsties, and fraught with such a fatal tendency. And as the jury, that great bulwark of our liberties, are judges of law as well as facts, so the jury of critics ought also to give their opinion of facts as well as language.

As a romance this book will afford some amusement to those idle readers, who are the sole support of circulating libraries. To such repositories and to such readers I wish to see the American Farmer's Letters wholly consigned.

To check as much as possible the fatal tendency of such publications, cannot be an object beneath the attention of the guardians of our laws and liberties; and no method is more salutary, than by making such wise laws, and giving such encouragement to our agriculture, manufactures and commerce, as shall provide sufficient resources for em-

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employing the industry of all our people, and enabling them to live contented with their condition, without wishing to pursue romantic schemes, for the attainment of that happiness which they might enjoy at home, under the mildest of Governments and the best of Kings.

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